

Short communications

Bat-hunting behaviour of the Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*

The Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates* (weighing between 645 and 850 g (Kemp 1994)) is known to prey on reptiles, birds, rodents, amphibians and insects (Kemp 1994, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Dean & Milton 2005), including termite alates (BPF, pers. obs.). Here we report, for the first time according to our knowledge, on bat-hunting behaviour by this bird species. The observations were made near the Seronera Research Centre, Serengeti National Park (SNP), Tanzania (2° 26'S, 34° 51'E; 1535 m). The Dark Chanting Goshawk is a commonly occurring breeding resident of the open woodlands in the SNP (Zimmerman *et al.* 2001).

At 18:30 (dusk) on 20 September 2007, six African Sheath-tailed Bats *Coleura afra* which weigh between 10 and 12 g (Dunlop 1997) were observed leaving their day roost located under the roof of the residential house of the research station. (NB: the bats were identified from digital pictures and videos using the Kingdon (1997) mammal guide). A Dark Chanting Goshawk of unknown sex glided down from a branch (c. 5 m high) of a nearby tree (*Acacia tortilis*), where it had positioned itself prior, and plunged down among the dispersing group of bats. The individual stooped with stretched legs and spread-out talons in between the flying bats. The raptor made a second similar attack after a turning manoeuvre in mid-air before returning to its original perch.

Two minutes later a new group of four more sheath-tailed bats left the roost using the same exit and once more the goshawk launched a similar mid-air attack with spread tail feathers. Neither of these attacks was successful though. Merely another minute later, a third group of about ten bats left the roost at a second exit behind the same house. Once more, the raptor was observed to launch several more aerial attacks lasting for about three minutes on the chiropterans with spread talons followed by sharp mid-air turns, but no bats were captured. All attacks occurred in the immediate vicinity of the bat's day roost exits and the bird of prey did not pursue the bats further. Instead, it returned to its original perch on the *Acacia* and left the scene at about 18:40 with its characteristic wing beat, presumably since no additional bats came out from under the roof.

Remarkably, the bats responded on the following day by emerging a considerable 20 minutes later than any other night in the previous two weeks. A similar response in bats was documented by Fenton *et al.* (1994). The goshawk was not seen that night. Indeed, in the following two weeks it was only observed during daytime. Although the Dark Chanting Goshawk was not successful in its bat-hunting attempts (8 observed attacks), these were repeated,

purposeful attacks. Therefore, we believe that this observation constitutes a noteworthy addition to the list of raptors hunting bats opportunistically (e.g., Baker 1962, Rutledge 1986, Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Fenton *et al.* 1994, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Brown 2007). This is even more noteworthy because Dark Chanting Goshawks are not renowned for aerial agility at catching flying prey, compared to other accipiters and falcons, perhaps leading to the unsuccessful attempts by this individual.

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